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ABSTRACT

In spring 1984, a study was conducted at Sacramento City College (SCC) to explore whether students' reading and study skills improved after participation in an "adjunct" skills course (i.e., a team-taught course which presents reading, writing, and study skills education within the context of a regular college course). The study focused on 38 students enrolled in a child development adjunct class which emphasized textbook reading and study techniques and writing clear essay answers. Study findings included the following: (1) there was no significant difference in students' pre- and post-test scores on the Test of Adult Basic Education reading test; (2) of the 17 students who completed a 10-item informal reading test constructed from the course text before and after the course, 53% had higher post-test scores and 24% had the same pre- and post-test scores; (3) 64% felt they had better study habits after completing the course; (4) 100% felt the study skills portion of the class was helpful; (5) only one of the nine students with reading scores below the 9th grade level completed the course with a C grade or better; (6) 40% of the enrolled students received a D, F, or Incomplete, or dropped the class; and (7) the class retention rate was 74%, compared to the college's overall rate of 67.8%. (LAL)

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AT SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

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REPORT ON ADJUNCT INSTRUCTION

AT SACRAMENTO CITY COLLEGE

by Linda Briggs and Del Prescott

Many college instructors experience frustration at what they observe as "declining student skills." They report that a large segment of students enrolled in regular academic courses appear unable to read, understand, and remember the course text. Students also seem overwhelmed when asked to write an essay exam.

A common scenario on community college campuses appears to be that beginning student's skills are assessed at time of entrance and those scores indicate that the students should take remedial skills courses, but because of stigma associated with skills classes or because of "wasted" time, the majority of "needy" students do not sign up for these classes. In the spring 1983, 2,013 students at Sacramento City College were assessed, according to the College Assessment Test (TASK), as needing remedial skills instruction. Of that number, only 543 signed up for remedial reading instruction. Undoubtedly these students enrolled in content classes even though their reading and writing skills were not appropriate for entrance into a regular college class.

"Adjunct" skills instruction has been implemented at Sacramento City College as one method of dealing with both the lack of students' reading and writing skills and the reluctance of students to sign up for remedial skills classes before they begin regular college classes. This model of instruction is a team teaching approach which presents reading, writing and study skills education within the context of a regular college course. Two instructors, a skills instructor and a content instructor, integrate the instruction and learning of subject-matter/content with skill improvement. Students are given reading, writing, and study skill assignments using the text and materials of the regular content course. This form of "integrated" instruction gives the students the opportunity to immediately apply skills techniques to their regular course work and is therefore more relevant and integral to their college experience. In this way it differs from skills instructions presented in remedial courses or learning centers that are removed from the regular classroom.

This methodology has been recommended by reading experts for years; however, it is rarely implemented at the college level. Sacramento City College has been offering integrated content/skills instruction in selected courses for over five years where one form of this model, adjunct instruction, operates in one or two content courses each semester. The English department "loans out" an instructor to another department and that instructor teams with a content instructor within his/her content class. (The department provides the FTE with no student income.) Adjunct instruction has been implemented also through the vocational education department. The skills instructor is paid through VEA funds and teaches in a vocational adjunct class for extra pay, or the VEA funds are paid directly to the English department and the skills instructor teaches the adjunct class as part of the regular load.

The objectives of adjunct instruction include increasing the reading, writing and studying efficiency of all students who are enrolled in a content class as well as providing methods of improvement for students who have low skill proficiency. An added benefit of adjunct instruction is the opportunity for content instructors to gain insight into specific methods for dealing with their students' skill needs. Thus, adjunct instruction becomes, in effect, a method of staff development.

As skills instructors who have been involved in integrated skills/content settings for the past four years, our observations of the learning that takes place in this interdisciplinary environment are extremely positive. In the Spring of '84 we sought to collect data which would provide concrete information about the value of integrated skills/content instruction from the point of view of improvement in student skills. The question asked was: "Did students' reading and study skills improve after their participation in an adjunct course?"

DESCRIPTION OF ADJUNCT INSTRUCTION

The goals and emphases of adjunct instruction vary with the instructors involved and the student need. The adjunct class in this report was a Child Development Class with the skills instructor funded through a VEA grant. The skills goals for the class were: 1) Improving textbook reading and studying techniques and 2) Writing clear and well-developed essay answers.

The format of an integrated adjunct/content class depends on the instructors involved. The most ideal situation is team teaching, not turn teaching, where both instructors are involved with presentation of content and skill activities. However, the adjunct class being considered in this report was done in a more segregated format -- the content instructor would present lectures or movies and the skills instructor would take approximately 15-20 minutes each class (and occasionally an entire class) for skill activities.

GOAL #1

All of the skill activities used the course text and course information as the basis. Teaching the students how to read the text involved exercises in previewing, question -writing, underlining, margin notating, mapping, and paraphrasing. All skills were discussed, modeled, and practiced. For example, students would be given an example of how to underline a section of the text and shown how to make a cognitive map of that section. For homework they would be asked to underline another section of the text and fill in ideas on a partial map given to them on a ditto. Those assignments would be gone over in the next class session and then students would get into small groups and create their own maps for another section they had already read, underlined and notated. Mapping was practiced and reinforced throughout the semester. At one point, for added incentive, the content instructor permitted cognitive maps of entire chapters to be used on exams.

Students were also given many techniques for studying their text and lecture information such as: 1) Information Charting; 2) Making up test questions; 3) Making summary sheets; 4) Using mnemonic devices. Each technique was first demonstrated, explained, and then practiced. Progress or problems were monitored by the skills instructor, who gave as much personal attention to individual students as possible. Part of the purpose of adjunct instruction or any skills instruction is to enhance self-confidence and motivation. Positive instructor comments, in addition to things that could be improved, were included on every assignment. And efforts were made to maintain an attitude of encouragement and personal concern throughout the semester.

GOAL #2

Most students in this particular class had never written an essay test before. They balked when they were told they would have to. Two writing workshops (1 hour each) were held before the first essay exam. For the first essay test, students were given the question ahead of time. Steps leading up to the exam included: 1) Practice in writing thesis statements; 2) Modeling of how to brainstorm and organize for an essay answer; 3) Having students fill in a rough outline of an essay answer to a question from their text; 4) Having students brainstorm and make an outline (which they had to get approved before writing) of the answer to the essay test question before the exam; 5) Writing the essay from the already-prepared outline. The next essay test required students to do more of the work independently. They were told the question would be a compare/contrast type. They were given a model of an outline and an essay of that type and they were told which two subsections of the text the question would be taken from. They were not allowed to use notes or an outline at the time of the exam.

PROCEDURE FOR MEASURING GROWTH

A variety of pre and post measures were used to determine student skill improvement in the Child Development Adjunct Class.

- 1) Standardized Reading Test - Two forms of the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) were administered, one the first week of the semester and one the last week of the semester. Scores were analyzed for significant variance and percentage of improved scores.
- 2) Informal Reading Inventory - A ten item main idea, inference, and vocabulary test was constructed from a chapter at the beginning of the students' text for a pre test and from a chapter at the end of the text for a posttest. Students were also asked to underline the main idea of a passage on both the pre and posttest. The tests were scored and the scores analyzed.
- 3) Habit Survey - At the beginning of the semester an informal reading habit inventory was given to the students. They were asked 25 questions about their reading and study habits. The answers were weighted on a Lickert scale and total scores tabulated. The same survey was given at the end of the semester and the total class and individual scores were compared.

- 4) Student Questionnaire - At the end of the semester the students were asked to complete a questionnaire which sought to elicit their opinions about adjunct instruction. They were asked if they found it helpful, whether it should be taught as part of a Child Development class, and if they learned any new reading, writing and study techniques.

RESULTS

- 1) Standardized Reading Test - The Reading test used was the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). Of the 21 students completing both the pre and post tests, 85% had higher or the same grade level total score. The average gain in terms of grade level score was 1.8 years. However, an analysis of variance, F test, revealed that there was no significant (.05 level) difference in pre and posttest scores. Unfortunately, the TABE test is normed only to the 12.9 grade level. Consequently, improvement could not be measured for students who received a top-of-the-scale grade on the pre test. A test such as the Nelson-Denny would have been a more appropriate measure since the norms go to the 16th grade level equivalency.
- 2) Informal Reading Inventory - Seventeen students completed the ten-item informal reading test constructed from the course text. Of that 17, 53% had higher scores and 24% had the same scores when comparing pre and post tests.
- 3) Habit Survey - Of the seventeen people completing the habit survey, 64% felt they had better study habits at the end of the adjunct instruction. The average increase was 11.6 points on a 100 point scale.
- 4) Student Questionnaire - It is impossible to properly quantify the results of the student questionnaire. The answers to the questions were not done on a Lickert Scale, and the questions were fairly open-ended. In answer to the question, "Should study skills be taught in a child development class or any other class?" The overwhelming response (100%) was "yes," but several students qualified the "yes" with recommendations that credit should be given for the study skills portion or that students should be warned that it's an adjunct class before registering for the class.

There was also a 100% positive response to the question, "Did you find the study skills portion of this class helpful?" The answers ranged from "somewhat" to "yes, definitely." The things listed most frequently as helpful were: 1) textbook marking and notations; 2) cognitive mapping and 3) essay handouts.

In general, the student questionnaires indicated that the students had a positive reaction toward including reading, writing, and study skills in the content class. Most felt they gained from the experience.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The methods used to measure growth in this study seem to indicate that the students enrolled in this adjunct course did improve their reading and study habits and their perceptions of their reading and study habits. Even though no statistically significant difference (.05 level) was demonstrated on pre and posttest scores, 85% of the people taking the standardized test either increased their score or had the same score (due to the "topping out" on the norms).

Also the majority of students increased their scores on the informal reading test and 64% on self-perception of reading and study habits. In addition all students indicated satisfaction with what was taught in the skills class and suggested they had gained from the experience.

A further analysis of the standardized test scores and final course grades yielded some interesting information.

- 1) 26% of the class (10/38) enrolled at the beginning of the semester did not complete the class. The average total reading grade level of that group was 9.2, which suggested that reading deficiencies may have been the reason they dropped. (Five of the eleven who dropped had reading scores below the 9th grade level.) Three students had a 12.9 level suggesting that reading problems did not lead to their dropping.
- 2) 3/38 students enrolled at the beginning of the semester had reading scores below the 9th grade level. Of these nine students, only one completed the course with a grade of C or better. Two received D's and the remaining five dropped the course. This information suggests that those students whose reading scores are below the 9th grade (or English 71, developmental reading at SCC) level are not likely to be successful in completing a content course.
- 3) 16/38 (40%) students enrolled at the beginning of the semester received a D, F, Inc. or dropped the class. The average reading score for this group was 9.3 grade level.
- 4) The retention rate, using 1st week figures, for the overall class was 74%. Retention rate for all of SCC is 67.8%; thus, suggesting that the skills and personal attention received in adjunct instruction may positively affect retention.
- 5) 10/38 or 26% of the class enrolled at the beginning of the semester scored at the 12th grade level and above. This is lower than the percentage of assessed students campus wide who score at that level on the TASK (school assessment test). The SCC Assessment Center data show that 44% of assessed students (those enrolling in English classes) score at the 12th grade or above level. It must be noted, however, that the standardized tests used by the Assessment Center and the one taken in the adjunct class were different and, therefore, precise comparisons cannot be made. However, a logical speculation might be that if everyone on campus were assessed (instead of just those enrolling in English classes or certain specialized programs) the percentage of scores 12th grade and above would be closer to the 26% level rather than the 44% level. 14/38 students in the adjunct class scored at the 10th and 11th grade level (37%) and 14/38 scored at the 9th grade level and below (37%). The Assessment Center's data indicate that 29.3% of assessed students score 10th and 11th

grade level and 25.8% score 9th grade and below. These figures again suggest that the Assessment Center data may give an inflated view of the reading level campuswide.

COMMENTS ABOUT ADJUNCT INSTRUCTION

Adjunct instruction can be one of the best forms of skill instruction, in addition to being a source of reinforcement to the content of a course. As adjunct instructors we have had, on the whole, extremely positive experiences. We have watched students become aware of their skill needs and work to remediate them. We've seen confidence grow and skills improve. We've observed content teachers excited about what they've learned about skills instruction and heard how they applied their new knowledge to their other classes. Like all things, however, adjunct instruction is not without its problems.

The most frequent complaint (from students and content instructors) about adjunct instruction is that it takes time. Unless a separate skills class is taught in conjunction with the content class, the skills instruction must go on in the regular content class. This, of course, means there will be less time to cover the content. Maybe only fifteen chapters can be covered instead of eighteen or, if eighteen are covered, they can't be discussed and dealt with in the same way as previously. Therefore, for this type of adjunct instruction to be successful, the content instructor must have a commitment to the process of learning and to skill development as well as to the content. He/She must be flexible in approach and not overly concerned about presenting fewer lectures or altering other methods used in his/her regular classes.

At times students within integrated skills/content classes complain that they have to do too much work. "Other classes don't have to write essay exams;" or "I just want to 'read' my text. I don't want to have to do all those other things to it." This is a legitimate complaint in that students are probably having to do more than a regular class (not that this is all that bad!). Also students often have difficulty seeing that a little harder work now will make less work in the long-run. The only solutions to this problem are: 1) offer a skills class back-to-back with a content class and all students who score below a certain level on an assessment test (plus students who want to) would be required to take the skills class. Number-wise this would work out quite nicely since content classes tend to enroll about fifty students and approximately 60% (according to Assessment Center estimates) would require skills instruction, making a class of 30 for skills instruction taught along with a content class; 2) offer 1 unit of credit for adjunct classes or offer 1.5 units under the umbrella of an existing English class. (The problem with the existing English class plan, however, is that about 25% of the students wouldn't have a high enough qualifying score of the assessment test). 3) offer a content-oriented skills class (no qualifying assessment score) that would service a group of similar content classes (5 history classes or 3 sociology and 2 history classes etc.). The skills instructor could visit the various content classes and thus deal with the required skills in a fashion relevant to the content. It could be a 1.5 unit class offered twice during the semester. Students in all content classes scoring below a certain level on the assessment test would be required to take the class.

To a large extent the success of integrated or adjunct instruction depends on the instructional team. The team should be compatible in educational philosophies and consistent in classroom policies. Both members of the team must be learners themselves and willing to be flexible, take risks, change past behaviors and teaching strategies. We have been on teams with teachers who were excited about the new things they were learning and conveyed that enthusiasm to their students. Previous plans were set aside, and time was spent planning, executing and evaluating a joint skills/content approach with the skills instructor. Their other content classes changed too as a result of this exposure.

On the other hand, we have worked with instructors who got into integrated instruction mainly because of a stipend offered and who were not willing to incorporate skills instruction into their lessons. Skill improvement activities, therefore became "in addition to," and students were consequently conveyed the message that the skills work was an added burden. One particular content instructor made skills activities and assignments "extra credit," thus not requiring students to write, for example, the essay test -- only if they wanted "extra points." Luckily most students did participate and learn (almost in spite of the situation) but, unfortunately, the ones who needed it the most opted out of "extra credit."

Adjunct instruction can be a marvelous experience for both students and instructors; however, both instructors need to be team players -- no unilateral decisions about course requirements, lesson plans or strategies. This takes a lot of communication, commitment and rapport but the benefits to both instructors and students are worth it.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

A repeat of this research would be desirable with the following improvement:

- 1) A different standardized test should be used, preferably the Nelson-Denny or a test which is normed past the 12.9 grade level.
- 2) A pre and post essay exam should be used to judge growth in the stated goal of essay test writing.
- 3) Comparison of an adjunct class could be made to a control group of a content class of the same course, doing pre and post-testing of both groups.